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CAIRO FOR DOETSCH, BAGHDAD FOR FOLEY, PRM FRONT OFFICE

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TAGS: PREF PGOV SY

SUBJECT: EFFORTS TO HELP IRAQI REFUGEES IN SYRIA MOVING FORWARD

CLASSIFIED BY: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES MICHAEL H. CORBIN FOR REASONS 1.4 B/D

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: A MONTH AFTER THE GENEVA CONFERENCE ON IRAQI REFUGEES, OUR CONTACTS REPORT THAT THEY ARE MAKING PROGRESS IN THEIR EFFORTS CONTINUE TO ASSIST IRAQIS IN SYRIA.

UNHCR'S REPRESENTATIVE LAURENS JOLLES TOLD US THAT MOST OF HIS ORGANIZATION'S GRANT AGREEMENTS IN SYRIA HAVE BEEN SIGNED, WITH CORRESPONDING FUNDS DISBURSED, AND THAT THE SARG HAS ALSO RECENTLY DEVELOPED A STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP) FOR FOREIGN NGOS AND RELIEF AGENCIES SEEKING TO OPERATE IN SYRIA, ALTHOUGH NONE OF THEM ARE EVER ACTUALLY ALLOWED TO REGISTER. UNHCR STAFF ARE REGISTERING 400 NEW IRAQI CASES PER DAY AND SINCE 2003 HAVE REGISTERED MORE THAN 82,500 PERSONS, JOLLES SAID. OF THOSE, MORE THAN 1,050 PERSONS HAVE BEEN SUBMITTED TO THE U.S. FOR RESETTLEMENT, HE SAID. UNHCR DAMASCUS CONTINUES TO MONITOR CLOSELY THE STATUS OF IRAQI PALESTINIANS IN SYRIA AND ASSISTS COLLEAGUES FROM IRAQ AND AMMAN WHO CONDUCT MONTHLY VISITS TO AN ESTIMATED 940 IRAQI PALESTINIANS ON THE IRAQ SIDE OF THE TANEF-WALID BORDER CROSSING IN THE SOUTH, JOLLES SAID. ACCORDING TO THE SYRIA ICRC REPRESENTATIVE, THE AL-WALID POPULATION HAS ADEQUATE FOOD, WATER AND SUPPLIES BUT SUFFERS FROM A LACK OF ACCESS TO ADEQUATE HEALTH CARE. ICRC CONTINUES TO INVESTIGATE THE POSSIBILITY OF MOVING THE AL-WALID POPULATION TO A SITE FARTHER FROM THE BORDER, DUE TO SECURITY CONCERN RAISED DISPLACED PERSONS CLAIMS THAT UNKNOWN PERSONS REGULARLY HARASS AND PHOTOGRAPH THEM, HE SAID. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) UNHCR-SARG RELATIONS: JUST A MONTH AFTER THE "INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ADDRESSING THE HUMANITARIAN NEEDS OF REFUGEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN IRAQ AND NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES" IN GENEVA, OUR CONTACTS REPORT THAT THEY ARE MAKING PROGRESS IN THEIR EFFORTS CONTINUE TO ASSIST DISPLACED IRAQIS IN SYRIA. JOLLES TOLD POLOFF ON MAY 16 THAT HIS OFFICE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SARG HAVE IMPROVED DRAMATICALLY FOLLOWING THE FEBRUARY VISIT OF UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES ANTONIO GUTERRES. GRANT AGREEMENTS WITH THE SYRIAN MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION AND HEALTH HAVE BEEN SIGNED AND FUNDS DISBURSED, AS HAD A NUMBER OF GRANTS WITH MOST OTHER IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS INCLUDING THE SEMI-AUTONOMOUS SYRIAN ARAB RED CRESCENT AND SMALLER RELIEF ORGANIZATIONS. REFLECTING ONGOING UNCERTAINTIES WITHIN THE SARG BUT AN MFA DESIRE TO MOVE ASSISTANCE PROJECTS FORWARD, DEPUTY FM FAISAL MIKDAD SIGNED THE AGREEMENT WITH THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH. A SMALL GRANT FOR LESS THAN USD 50,000 WITH THE MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION HAS YET TO MOVE FORWARD, SAID JOLLES, WHO DID NOT PROVIDE FURTHER DETAILS.

¶3. (C) NGO REGISTRATION AND OPERATING ABILITY: THE SARG HAS ALSO RECENTLY DEVELOPED A SOP FOR FOREIGN NGOS AND RELIEF

AGENCIES GIVING THEM PERMISSION TO OPERATE IN SYRIA, ALTHOUGH NONE OF THEM ARE EVER ACTUALLY ALLOWED TO REGISTER, JOLLES SAID. THE SOP REQUIRES THE HEADQUARTERS OF THESE ORGANIZATIONS TO SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE SYRIAN ARAB RED CRESCENT OUTLINING THE KIND OF WORK PROPOSED FOR SYRIA, INCLUDING THE LEVEL OF FUNDING THAT THE GROUP WOULD BRING WITH IT. THE RED CRESCENT VETS THE PROJECT AND FORWARDS IT TO THE MFA, WHICH IN TURN PASSES IT TO SECURITY SERVICES FOR CLEARANCE, JOLLES SAID. NOTIFICATION OF SARG APPROVAL FOR THE PROPOSED PROJECT IS MADE BY THE SYRIAN MINISTER OF STATE FOR RED CRESCENT AFFAIRS BASHAR AL-SHAAR. (NOTE: SEPARATELY, THE DEPUTY FMS OFFICE DIRECTOR HUSSAM AALA TOLD THE CHARGE ON MAY 17 THAT INTERESTED FOREIGN ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD APPLY DIRECTLY TO THE SYRIAN EMBASSY IN THE HOST COUNTRY, AS REPORTED SEPTEL. END NOTE.)

¶4. (C) SUCCESSFUL ORGANIZATIONS ARE REQUIRED TO KEEP THE RED CRESCENT INFORMED ABOUT THEIR PROJECT, BUT FUNDING AND STAFFING ARE INDEPENDENT AND AN ORGANIZATION CAN PARTNER WITH OTHER AUTHORIZED GROUPS ALREADY WORKING IN SYRIA, JOLLES STATED. GROUPS THAT HAVE SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED THE PROCESS INCLUDE: THE NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL, THE DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL, SAVE THE CHILDREN UK, MEDECINS DU MONDE-GREECE, ISLAMIC RELIEF, INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL CORPS, AND PREMIERE URGENCE-FRANCE, JOLLES SAID. A HANDFUL OF U.S. ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS MERCY CORPS AND SOME GULF GROUPS HAVE NOT BEEN GRANTED THE RIGHT TO OPERATE IN SYRIA, POSSIBLY BECAUSE OF THE WAY THEY HANDLED THEIR APPLICATION PROCESS, HE ADDED.

¶5. (C) UNHCR REGISTRATION LEVELS: UNHCR STAFF ARE REGISTERING 400 NEW IRAQI CASES PER DAY AND SINCE 2003 HAVE REGISTERED MORE THAN 82,500 PERSONS, JOLLES SAID. OF THOSE, MORE THAN 1,050 PERSONS HAVE BEEN SUBMITTED TO THE U.S. FOR RESETTLEMENT, HE SAID. THE REGISTERED IRAQIS INCLUDE 47

PERCENT SUNNI, 25 PERCENT SHIA, AND 22 PERCENT CHRISTIANS, ACCORDING TO UNHCR STATISTICS CURRENT AS OF MAY 10.

¶6. (C) PALESTINIANS: UNHCR CONTINUES TO MONITOR CLOSELY THE STATUS OF IRAQI PALESTINIANS, INCLUDING THE APPROXIMATELY 310 PERSONS IN THE EL HOL CAMP IN NORTHEASTERN SYRIA AND ABOUT 350 PERSONS IN THE NO-MAN'S-LAND AT THE AL-TANEF BORDER CROSSING IN THE SOUTH, JOLLES SAID. RECENTLY, A HANDFUL OF THE IRAQI PALESTINIANS HAVE CHOSEN TO LEAVE AL-TANEF AND EITHER RETURN TO BAGHDAD OR MOVE TO THE AL-WALID CROSSING ON THE IRAQI SIDE OF THE BORDER, HE SAID. ADDITIONALLY, A FEW OF THE IRAQI PALESTINIANS HAVE BEEN GRANTED PERMISSION TO ENTER INTO SYRIA THROUGH THE INTERVENTION OF HAMAS, JOLLES SAID.

¶7. (C) UNHCR DAMASCUS ALSO ASSISTS UNHCR COLLEAGUES FROM BAGHDAD AND AMMAN WHO TRAVEL TO SYRIA MONTHLY TO ACCESS THE APPROXIMATELY 940 IRAQI PALESTINIANS ON THE IRAQ SIDE OF THE AL-TANEF/AL-WALID BORDER, JOLLES SAID. IN A SEPARATE CONVERSATION, INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE RED CROSS DAMASCUS REPRESENTATIVE JEAN-JACQUE FRESARD TOLD POLOFF MAY 17 THAT HIS OFFICE HAD RECENTLY RECEIVED SARG PERMISSION TO ACCESS THE WALID POPULATION FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ALMOST FOUR MONTHS AND PLANNED TO MAKE REGULAR VISITS EVERY TWO TO THREE WEEKS. ACCORDING TO FRESARD, THE AL-WALID POPULATION HAS ADEQUATE FOOD, WATER AND SUPPLIES BUT SUFFERS FROM A LACK OF ACCESS TO ADEQUATE HEALTH CARE FACILITIES. ICRC PLANS TO REHABILITATE A SMALL CLINIC NEAR AL-WALID BUT ALSO CONTINUES TO INVESTIGATE THE POSSIBILITY OF MOVING THE AL-WALID POPULATION TO A SITE FARTHER FROM THE BORDER DUE TO DISPLACED PERSONS' CLAIMS THAT UNKNOWN PERSONS REGULARLY HARASS AND PHOTOGRAPH THEM, HE SAID.
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